

## MEMO

**To: ABAG Regional Planning Committee**  
**From: Kenneth Kirkey, Planning Director**  
**Date: February 6, 2008**  
**Subject: FOCUS Update – Priority Conservation Area - Nomination Process**

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### **Priority Conservation Area Nomination Process**

#### **Background**

Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) play an important role in the implementation of regional planning goals under the FOCUS Program. PCAs are areas that provide opportunities for land conservation in the near-term through purchase or easement. Identification of these areas will help direct financial resources and help leverage new partnerships and opportunities in the next 1-5 years for permanent protection of regionally significant places where a sense of urgency and consensus in support of protection exists.

#### **PCA Nominations- 1st Call**

The nominations received during the first call for nominations represent an array of conservation values ranging from agriculture to habitat and recreation. Staff has reviewed the nominations and sought the input of all jurisdictions where nominations are being proposed. Staff has also received input from a review panel comprised of land conservation experts from across the region as well as stakeholder representatives from economic development, affordable housing, and urban land development entities.

To date, the nomination process has been highly successful in that 100+ nominations have been submitted from across the Bay Area. Most jurisdictions have been supportive of the nominations submitted within their respective boundaries. However, based upon feedback received, particularly from the Regional Planning Committee, staff is proposing that local jurisdictions have an additional opportunity to offer feedback on the nominations.. Postponing regional adoption of Priority Conservation Areas by the Executive Board to July, 2008 will provide opportunities for more local government input, better coordination among parallel planning efforts, and development of an approach to urban parks in the Priority Development Areas.

#### **Parallel Planning Efforts**

#### **Upland Habitat Goals Project**

The Upland Habitat Goals Project is an effort lead by the Bay Area Open Space Council that will describe the types, amounts and distribution of upland habitats, linkages, compatible uses and the ecological processes needed to sustain diverse and healthy communities of plant, fish and wildlife resources. Staff is not proposing that the Upland Habitat Goals project be utilized as additional criteria in the PCA nomination process. However, Upland Habitat Goals will provide information regarding important habitat values among the Priority Conservation Areas. This information will be particularly useful to land conservation funding entities. Information pertaining to the Upland Habitat Goals Project is slated to be released in June, 2008.

## **Green Vision 2025**

Green Vision 2025 is a land conservation effort led by the Bay Area Open Space Council and Greenbelt Alliance with a goal of creating a long-term vision for land conservation protection for the Bay Area. This process shares a similar goal to the FOCUS Priority Conservation Areas of resource protection, and is both complementary to and in other respects distinct from the PCA effort.

PCAs will highlight opportunity areas in the near-term for permanent protection through purchase or easement. PCAs are not a zoning or general plan classification and do not directly impact land use policy at the local level. Green Vision will advocate for and serve as a vision the long-term policy and land protection needs of this region. The FOCUS PCAs, the Green Vision effort, and the Upland Habitat Goals project provide a basis for better coordination in the Bay Area relative to the protection of important resource areas. Going forward, FOCUS staff will coordinate with the Upland Habitat Goals Project and the Green Vision effort to analyze the habitat values in PCAs and how near-term conservation opportunities relate to longer-term needs.

## **Priority Development Areas - Urban Parks**

The Priority Conservation Areas generally represent large-scale landscapes related to agriculture, natural or scenic resources and recreational areas. The majority of the nominated areas are in unincorporated rural areas. Over 100 Priority Development Areas in 50 of the region's jurisdictions were adopted by the ABAG Executive Board in November, 2007. Many of the PDA jurisdictions have identified urban parks and greenspaces as a critical component of developing livable and sustainable neighborhoods near transit. Adoption of the Priority Conservation Areas in July, 2008 provides an opportunity to support and develop a strategy for supporting urban parks within Priority Development Areas. Propositions 1C and 84 passed by voters in November 2006 still have funds available for urban parks but require legislative action to be appropriated. ABAG is working with our partner FOCUS agencies and the State Coastal Conservancy to secure funding for urban parks within the Priority Development Areas.

## **PCA Nomination Process – Proposed Updated Timeline**

As outlined in the timetable below, staff is proposing that subsequent to updating the Joint Policy Committee (JPC) in February, staff will send letters to local jurisdictions both elected officials and senior staff regarding staff's recommendations on the PCA nominations received. This will provide additional time for local government officials to inquire further about the nominated areas and provide further feedback prior to providing ABAG's Executive Board with recommendations for adoption of the Priority Conservation Areas. Staff will simultaneously provide the non-jurisdictional PCA nominating entities with information on the revised process timeline. Upon receipt of any additional feedback on the nominations from the jurisdictions staff will incorporate the input from local jurisdictions and present recommendations to the JPC in May, 2008 and the RPC in June, 2008 prior to consideration by the ABAG Executive Board in July, 2008.

In conclusion, a later adoption of Priority Conservation Areas will provide new opportunities for local government input, coordination with parallel conservation planning efforts, and development of an urban parks strategy for the Priority Development Areas.

The revised timeline is as follows:

| 2008                | MAJOR ACTIVITIES   |
|---------------------|--|
| Jan to April        | Update regional policy bodies on the Priority Conservation Area (PCA) process; Follow-up with applicants and local jurisdictions   |
| May to June         | Coordinate PCAs with Green Vision and Upland Habitat Goals and Priority Development Areas with Urban Parks; Present recommendations to JPC and RPC for endorsement; Develop PCA descriptions |
| July to September   | Present recommendations to the ABAG Executive Board for regional adoption of PCAs; Finalize PCA products; Revise nomination materials for 2nd round of nominations                           |
| October to December | Make 2nd call for nominations; Hold PCA workshop for funders and applicants  |

### **RPC Feedback**

Staff is seeking approval from the RPC regarding the proposed revised timeline for PCA adoption.